Mental Me

I’m skipping my spring finals. At this point, it’s kinda worth it. I wasn’t even prepared for them. It’s a good thing I’m being checked into a mental hospital. At least I might get out of my tests.

*My junior year was a downward spiral for me. At sixteen, my twin brother, Jacob, had moved in with our older brother a state away. I took the liberty of moving into his old room, which made me miss him a lot less, since his room was a lot bigger. My room was so small two of them could probably fit in Jacob’s room, so moving in took some of the sadness away. It was the fall of my junior year and things started out okay. I had my best friend in my favorite class with me at school. I was looking into colleges and keeping my 3.75 gpa up. True, I had to do all of the chores around the house now. But life seemed to be pretty nice to me at the moment.*

*And then my stepmom asked me if I would be okay with moving to live with my grandparents, basically kicking me out. Since the time I had told her about being sexually abused as a child, she became more and more protective of me to the point that she couldn’t stand to have to care for me anymore. It was driving her crazy. So I had to go.*

I’m being checked into the hospital after hours. The night is cool and still lit even though it’s getting late. Jeremy, my older brother and now my legal guardian, came in with me, on and off the phone with his boss, who apparently knows the situation. Great. As if being checked into an asylum wasn’t bad enough; now people I don’t even know think I’m crazy.

Jeremy fills out the paperwork, occasionally asking me to help him with some of the needed information. Now I’m being weighed and questioned; now, my body loosely examined. What isn’t allowed to come with me is left behind. My headphones, the string in my jacket hood, it all has to go. I’m not allowed to have anything that might help me hang myself in here.

I only have to stay here for a week. That’s what the counselor said, anyway. The one time I went to a counselor and she recommended I go to a behavioral hospital. That’s the only way I could get a prescription for anti-depressants. Because I hurt myself. I still don’t know why I told her I cut. I had finally been able to see a counselor, for free, the first visit paid for by my church or something. I’m still not exactly sure. But the one hour we spent getting acquainted with each other ended in the recommendation to a hospital. But having not made time to study for my finals that started the next day, I was actually more inclined to go. I didn’t want to study, and anti-depressants seemed like the way to liberate myself from that. And that dark hole I was in, too.

*My bags were packed to move in with my grandparents 395 miles away from my home, my parents, and my best friend. It was so difficult explaining to my teachers and other friends why I was leaving. At the time, I didn’t quite understand it myself. My parents took me to dinner that night they dropped me off at the airport. Around my shoulder hung a small Coach purse, most likely a knock-off, and a near-perfect one. A wallet to match was tucked inside. My mom had given the set to me the morning I left. A good-bye present, I guessed. We went to a dent-in-the-road Mexican restaurant to have my last meal. It seemed like a normal night, as if I was just leaving to go visit my grandparents for Christmas break, not live with them. When we got to the airport, my parents dropped me off and said their goodbyes. I was alone, waiting to be taken to Arkansas.*

The “night guard”—the woman in charge of the overflow floor at night—meets me with dinner; it is really late, but I am finally done with the check-in process. Jeremy has gone, and I follow the woman to my room after eating my meal on the floor beside her. Another girl is there, talking comfortably with the night guard. Not her first time here. Apparently she just came from a different hospital. My room assignment is in a double room, but I am alone. I am given sheets and the lady helps me make up my bed. Then lights out. It’s after ten; everyone has been in bed for a while now. I have nothing but the clothes on my body with me. I won’t be able to get anything from home until at least tomorrow.

*Arkansas was now my home, not Texas. But I was not to live with my grandparents. My grandpa explained that he was too sick, and he asked me if I would live with my brothers. Of course I would. I’d do anything for my grandparents. Still, I wasn’t at all thrilled to live with my brothers. Jeremy was in his mid-twenties and my twin brother was not yet seventeen. But I did get my own room with a bunk bed and walk-in closet. It seemed like a nice set-up, actually. And life with my brothers didn’t seem so bad at first. I thought I’d like living with my brothers. And for a while there, I enjoyed my freedom. But for Jeremy, work and drinking with friends until midnight or later seemed to be the most important way to spend his time. Jacob also worked and hung with friends when he wasn’t at school. Waiting up for them with the TV on on Friday nights, only to wind up going to bed before either of them came back was normal. Yet even when they were at our house, I was still so lonely. They were close; they watched TV or played video games a lot together. So taking my dinner to my room while they ate on the couch was also normal. I was alone.*

I’ve gotten to sleep alone these past few nights. The nurses gave me some of the things Jeremy brought up here. I’m glad I made a list for them; they had no idea what to bring me. Poor boys had to dig through my underwear drawer. What troopers.

I still haven’t really talked to anyone, so instead of trying to get to know the boy across from me during “alone time” in our rooms, I’ve spun in circles singing Norah Jones’ “Don’t Know Why.” There are kids here from around age five to eighteen, but for now I’m content swinging by myself, watching the nurses watch me, probably trying to see if I’ll go off and cut or something.

I got to see the psychiatrist person who can give me medicine. He came during my first day at the hospital and I told him everything in about five or ten minutes: why I thought I was there, why I thought I was so sad, my baggage. He comes every day now, every time it’s at night. But that’s ok. We talk for a few minutes, his secretary assistant taking notes, listening. He rarely sees me, looks at me. I think all of us patients might be the same to him. Just patients with similar problems.

I am supposed to see a normal counselor regularly. But so far I’ve only met with him during a “family” meeting or something. Jeremy was there. The therapist didn’t seem too interested in our meeting, and when he had stepped out for a few minutes before we began Jeremy whispered to me that his girlfriend is pregnant. He’ll have to marry her, he says. I don’t really like her. I wonder what he’s told her of this situation.

School in the mental hospital is a breeze. It’s the last week of school for them, and I guess it’s normal for kids in here to be of lower-to-average intellect. We’re all in a room together. On my first day of classes they took me out and made me sit at a desk for a few minutes with “day guards” of the two floors with temporary patients, two men, sitting close by talking to each other. Guess they all were trying to figure out where I was at school-wise. I feel like these night and day people are really just babysitters that take us to our different activities and meals and make sure we are following our daily routines. I have nothing to do, and I am starting to feel overwhelmed, so I tilt my arm on the desk toward me and away from them. I start scratching on my wrist. My other cuts are starting to heal, but I don’t reopen those anyway. I try to start fresh over the scars of previous cuts so they’re easier to keep covered. I barely bled, which was good. Less mess. But I did get lesions I can keep scratching at while I’m here.

When they stand up and tell me I can go back in, I slide my jacket sleeve over my arm and walk in. I sit in the last row a few seats back. I stare at the wall beside me. The teacher is nice, very wise, and seems to care more about us than what we are actually learning. I love school in the mental hospital.

*No one at my new school in Arkansas knew I had existed, even though it seemed like everyone knew Jacob and that he lived with his older brother. I guess he forgot to mention me. Friends were hard to come by. I did make one friend, Brandi. She seemed to be a bit ostracized, so I fit right in with her. At lunch, we sat with a group of people we both didn’t really like, but they were her and her boyfriend’s friends, so at least we had somewhere to sit.*

*And somehow I managed to get a boyfriend around that time. I’m not sure how that happened, but he came in my life right about the end of the semester. He was one of the guys that sat at the table with Brandi’s group. I spent more time with him than with my brothers. I didn’t necessarily want to date him when he asked me out, but he is sweet and kind and fun, so I said yes. I’m still dating him.*

I’ve been making friends now. Since this hospital is for minors, I’ve met kids who are mostly younger than me by a couple of years. I met a seven-year-old girl who had threatened to burn down her house. I overheard the nurses talking about the boy in the room across from me and learned he is diagnosed as truly psychotic, and they seem to feel sorry for him. I also talk to the girl that came the same night I did a lot. She’s my favorite older friend. My favorite little friend so far is a five or six year old boy who only seems to be angry because he’s always being bullied or looked over. I try to give him hugs and talk to him a lot. The nurses and babysitters give me suspicious looks. But I don’t care. I just think he needs love. I have a roommate now, too. She cuts a lot, more than me: on her arms, stomach, and legs, not just on her wrists. I think she’s been in a mental hospital before, too.

*I got a wide-band watch for Christmas from a distant relative the year I moved in with my brothers. I’ve made sure to wear that every day. I also wear a bunch of hair ties and even ribbons with the watch. And I make sure to always wear my jacket, or long sleeves. I have to hide what became my biggest joy in life, my release, my freedom. I’ve collected the media of my expression and keep them wrapped in a white shirt underneath a table-clothed nightstand in my room. I have to hide my “self-injury.” I’ve broken razor blades, kept broken glass from the kitchen, and experimented with other means of liberation. I’ve made sure to only cut my left wrist and arm within the area that I could hide. It’s so freeing. With each slice into my skin, I can breathe easier. With every drop of blood that streams out of my body, my chronic tears of loneliness turn into tears of relief, if only for a few moments.*

I am on my medicine. It hurts my stomach a little bit, but I’ve been told that’s normal. Just so body gets used to it. But no sign of me feeling…happy. Just sadness, still. There are brief moments of happiness, like hanging out with my friends. School is fun; we do easy things.

One of my friends said a guy from another floor was checking me out on our way back to our floor. She said I was switchin’ and he was looking at me. I had no idea that I was walking any differently, but if he thinks I was, at least someone thinks I’m attractive. I was weirded out a little, though. I think he’s a long-term patient.

They’ve put me in a room at the front of the hall by myself with a camera facing the bed. I hate it. They thought I wouldn’t cut now that I was on medicine in the hospital. Guess they know that’s not the case. That’s why they put in a room with a camera. But it still hasn’t stopped me from “hurting” myself. I just lie on my stomach on my bed and act like I’m reading.

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I was released from the hospital exactly one week after I was admitted with nothing to show for it but medicines that I would eventually feel like I was addicted to. I would get my high from them instead of my razor blades for a few months before I’d start to use both to feel better. I had the most support from my grandpa and boyfriend, who would ultimately die and I’d foolishly leave, respectively. My brothers didn’t really seem to spend any more time with me than they did before my admittance. And I wouldn’t start to heal from my past and my baggage until college. I didn’t get counseling while I was in the hospital or out of it. I’m not really sure what being checked into a mental hospital did to affect me. Except make me feel even more alone when I wasn’t there.